

### Sir John Maundevile's Ants

Sir John Maundevile's "Boke of Trauels," which was popular during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries contains some amazing statements about remote kingdoms, giants, pygmies, animals and people, and hundreds of editions and versions have appeared in various languages. According to Maundevile, on the island of Taprobane, toward the eastern part of Prester John's Land, there were hills of gold kept by ants as large as hounds. These ants refined the gold and devoured people who came to the hills. However some men outwitted these giant ants. When the weather was hot and when the ants were resting in the earth the country folk would take camels, horses and other beasts and carry off the gold while the ants were in the earth. At other times when the weather was not hot and when the ants were abroad, some people would load mares with wide-mouthed, empty, low-hanging vessels, and send them forth to pasture in the fields. When the ants saw the vessels, their instinct being to allow nothing to remain empty, they would fill them up with anything nearby and in this case it was gold. The ants would tolerate all animals except man. Some scholars claim that Maundevile never existed, or that if he did, he was a colossal borrower and liar. Others believe that his book was a compilation by a physician of Liège named Jehan de Bourgogne who borrowed freely from the works of early geographers and added the results of his imagination.—H. B. W.